

Confidential* * * * * Not for Publication

1960-1961

The second half of May is usually the time when things again become quieter at the School when no School excavations are planned. The Fellows and Honorary Lecturers return to their American institutions after more or less extensive visits to Europe and the rest of the Near East. Visitors are fewer than before or than they will be during the summer. It is still with pleasure that we have welcomed to the School Mr. Ben Farley, a theological student who visited here for a few weeks. Prof. Calloway, who came to join Miss Kenyon's expedition, Prof. Chandren from India, Prof. and Mrs. Filson, Prof. French, Prof. Hammond and his party (MM. Cox and Salmon), who will soon begin work at Petra, and Mrs. Allison, who has also joined Miss Kenyon's staff.

If, then, the activities of the School as such have been lately limited to several trips taken by the Director, to frantic attempts at finishing dozens of small projects, and to the long job of drawing and analyzing Arak al-Amir's pottery by Paul Lapp, two major events have taken place in Jerusalem which must be reported. The first one is the birth on June 2nd of Daniel Lapp, a bouncy little boy, who is destined to great things through parentage as well as through the place of his birth.

The second event is the beginning in the second part of May of the joint Franco-British expedition to excavate certain parts of Jerusalem. Miss Kenyon and Pere de Vaux are co-directors of the whole operation, but, for this year at least, most of the personnel at the dig is British, including also two Americans. Various unfortunate circumstances have prevented the expedition from beginning its work where it had originally intended to begin. And, at the moment, its activities are concentrated in three places: on the slope of Ophel, quite near the pool of Silwan, where the dig is quite spectacularly set on the almost vertical slope; further up toward Mt. Zion, where only a small operation is planned; and just south of the Lutheran church of the Redeemer, inside the Old City, where the available land is small, but the results most interesting to a mediaevalist. Readers will of course, understand that it is not appropriate for me at this time to say anything about the results, but I trust that Miss Kenyon herself will do so upon completion of her work this year. It is, however, appropriate to add that we all wish success to this expedition; it will be a long and difficult one, fraught as it is with the unusual topographical, political, and historical problems of the Holy City, and yet there are few cities, outside of Rome and Jerusalem, whose excavation is endowed with so much glamor and expectation.

A discussion of present work in Jerusalem should not leave unmentioned the important activities of the White Fathers on the precincts of their property near the Pool of Bethesda. There were uncovered there several early cisterns, wall paintings of the Roman period, and what must have been one of the most spectacular Byzantine basilicas in Jerusalem, some 45 meters long, with an attached martyrium, whose mosaics have been preserved. Another five years will be needed to com-

plete this work, but it will no doubt open up an important sector of Roman Jerusalem.

Elsewhere in Jordan, Miss Kirkbride has been actively involved in her work at Beida, near Petra, and, according to reports, she has had some amazing results. Phil Hammond, a former Fellow of the School, has just arrived to begin work at Petra, and we may expect many interesting results during the summer.

Since this is the present Director's last Newsletter, it may be well for him to summarize some of the results of his work and, at the risk of taking the readers into what will probably be to many of them a terribly recent period, I should like to say a few things about the three areas of my research this year.

First, the photographing of the mosaics of the nave of the basilica of the Nativity and of the Aqsa mosque was accompanied by as thorough a study of these mosaics as their difficulty of access permitted. For comparative purposes, I have also been able to climb a number of times on the scaffolding inside the Dome of the Rock and, lately, to look at the hitherto almost unstudied mosaics of the drum. And a recent trip to Damascus was used to climb on more unsteady ladders and to walk on unsteady wooden platforms in order to look at the well-known mosaics of the Umayyad mosque, which are also being restored. The essential problems of all these mosaics are two. First, how should one date them? Second, what do they tell us about Islamic art, since we meet here with a very "un-Islamic" technique and especially since during the periods during which they were executed, we have practically no examples of Byzantine wall-mosaics for comparative purposes?

A first result of the work this year has been to show that it is wrong to consider wall-mosaics as an un-Islamic technique, limited to the early periods of Islam when the new culture was heavily influenced by Byzantium. It can be shown that the technique was used consistently in Umayyad (7th-8th centuries), Fatimid (10th-12th), Ayyubid (12-13th), and Mamluk (esp. 14th) periods. But it can also be shown that, except for certain specific places (niche-heads of mihrabs for instance; certain inscriptions), the inspiration for the themes of these mosaics tended to derive from formulas created in the 7th and 8th centuries. In other words, while the technique survived for several centuries, it remained as an archaizing technique. A second result concerns the dating of the mosaics. On this score, much still needs studying and certain problems of detail cannot be solved without an equipment which was not available to me. The following points may, however, tentatively be made: 1- on the basis on the almost untouched and now superbly cleaned mosaics of the octagonal arcades in the Dome of the Rock, it will be possible to define the major characteristics of early Islamic techniques and compositions; on this basis one may suggest that the mosaics of the drum of the building are essentially Umayyad, with the provision that certain panels, especially in the upper drum, have been redone at a later time; one may also suggest that the mosaics on the northern face of the nave of the Bethlehem basilica are Umayyad, but that the inscriptions were repaired in the 12th century; 2-The mosaics of the drums and pendentives of the Aqsa mosque are Fatimid, but the window which is found

on the triumphal arch has earlier mosaics. 3- The mosaics of the mihrab of the Aqsa mosque are Ayyubid as well as the fragments found on the piers. A few small fragments may be later.

The third line of investigation suggested by the mosaics--that of the origins and significance of their motives--needs the kind of work which can only be accomplished in better art historical libraries than the ones found in Jerusalem, and I will refrain from saying anything more about it.

Second, I have given the School Chevrolet quite a lot to do during the months of April and May, with two consecutive 5-day trips in the Jordanian desert and a similar expedition to Syria. As a result I believe now I have visited every single site suspected as being Umayyad except those of the wadi 'Arabah and Qasr Abyad in the Syrian desert (E. of the Hawran), for which our Syrian guide got so hopelessly lost that we had to turn back. These sites range from the easily accessible Khirbat al-Mafjar to the spectacular Jabal Says set inside the crater of a volcano way out in the Syrian desert.

In visiting them and in examining their architectural and other characteristics, it struck me that a great deal of the difficulties scholars have had so far in interpreting them has been caused by their attempt, on the basis of varying kinds of evidence (ceramic, architecture history), to assign them to certain periods and to deduce their character from the needs of the period. One may, I feel, start with the sites themselves, define their character, and then try to date them. In that manner, the following temporary conclusions may be reached: 1- it is a characteristic of an area which begins in the north between Aleppo and Raqqah and works its limits southward through Palmyra, the eastern Hawran, the Azraq depression, and an uncertain frontier east of Ma'an down to the Red Sea (the western boundary being more or less equivalent to the Ghawr depression with notable exceptions) that some time around the first century B.C. it developed as a major agricultural area, in which farmsteads were created with their paraphernalia of dams, canals, forts, roads, etc. This led at times to full-fledged towns as is particularly typical of northern Syria, but more often to simpler arrangements consisting of a large building or two, of a dam, of water channels, enclosures for animals, and so on. These foundations ceased to exist, almost without exceptions, after 750, when the depopulation of the area was accomplished, although the decadence had begun earlier. The area became an area of passage, saw a definite revival at the time of the Crusades and immediately thereafter, and sank into oblivion until the latter part of the 19th century. 2- Since this is an area which does not easily lend itself to diversified agriculture, we must conclude that certain imperative economic needs were fulfilled by these foundations. In northern Syria it has conclusively been shown that these needs consisted in the supplying in oil and wine of the great cities of Asia Minor. Whether the same is true in the south is still uncertain and before certain textual studies are made and explorations completed, we will have to deal in hypotheses. 3- This economic world had begun to decay around the time, and partly as a result of, the Persian invasions of the early part of the 7th century, but

they were given a partial shot in the arm by the conquering Arabs, and this for the following reasons. First they were probably inhabited by a population which was in sympathy with them. Second, as centers for needs other than their own, they were probably controlled and perhaps even owned (most of them required considerable financial investments for upkeep and for the contingencies of dry years) by wealthy city-dwellers, the very group which escaped at the time of the conquest. Hence the new masters of the area easily took over the abandoned ownership of these lands. Third, as opposed to the situation in Iraq, Iran, or Egypt, the Arabs in Syria neither founded new cities, nor, at the beginning at least, moved in large numbers into the old cities. Fourth, the Arabs from Arabia, more accustomed to the physical conditions of these areas than the semi-Hellenized city dwellers, were willing to build there their chateaux and to settle as actual landlords rather than as absentee landlords. Thus they introduced into some of them certain amenities of life, such as baths, rich paintings, mosaics, sculpture, and so on. This did not happen to all the sites, but to many of them, and the final abandonment was due as much to a willful destruction of Umayyad centers by the 'Abbasids centered in the new cities of Iraq as to the disappearance of the economic need of their existence as agricultural producers. 4-Important parallels for such developments exist on the northern edge of the Sahara desert, in Arabia, and in Central Asia.

Obviously enough it cannot be said that everything is solved by this manner of looking at these sites, but I hope to be able to show soon how it explains the precise development of many such foundations and eventually a few excavations should strengthen the point. Unfortunately most of these sites pose almost unsurmountable problems for the organization of an expedition. None of them has easily accessible water at the moment nor an easy access to laborers or food. The Department of Antiquities did begin a small clearing job at Mshatta, which yielded some important architectural results, but the work had to be abandoned.

My third series of investigations began during my numerous visits to the Haram area for the study of mosaics, and was further inspired by the perennial attempts of most visitors to Jerusalem to understand the older history of the city. As far as the Haram goes, such attempts center around the problems posed by the Solomonic and Herodian temples and eventually bog down in more or less uncertain attempts at fitting meagre and unclear archaeological remains with difficult and unscientifically minded texts. Having no pretense of knowing or understanding biblical descriptions of Jerusalem or even Josephus, I began to work at it backwards, i.e. granting the present position and character of the monuments of the area, what has to be assumed of an earlier layout in order to explain the present one? By putting the problem in this manner, I have been able to present some new interpretations of the western gates of the Haram (to be published soon) and I have begun work on the two related problems of the Golden Gate and of the underground buildings on the south side. But this is all still unfinished except for certain surveys.

All in all, as one may see, this has been a stimulating year, in which only a fraction of all plans and projects were accomplished, a feeling shared, I am sure, by many previous holders of the post of Director of the School. As I return to my normal duties, it is a vast new experience that I am bringing with me and it will only be fair to say that it could not have been possible without the full co-operation of the Trustees and Directors at home, the friendship and sympathy of our incoming director, Paul Lapp, and of the whole staff of the School. But their support of the School and of its directors is well known and by no means exceptional. The note on which I should like to end my tenure as Director is a different one, and one which I, as a mediaevalist and as an Islamicist, perhaps feel more strongly than my colleagues who deal with more ancient periods, although I am sure that many have felt it as well as I have. It is quite often that, during our search for new documents and new ideas, we feel impatient with the lack of interest in their past expressed by people we meet, or that, while working at the School, the discordant notes of the loudspeakers across the street disturb our concentration or our train of thought. Yet one can only feel humble when confronted with the land, whose understanding is our task. I think of the landscape, the view of the Mount of Olives for the first time from the Jericho Valley; of the majesty of the endlessly moving and yet endlessly unchanged desert; of the tortuous Siq and the dramatic wadis: of the magic of the water and sands at wadi Ram; of the precise reality of the Lithostratos or the curious foreignness of the onion domes on the slope of the Mount of Olives which yet blend in; of the view of the whole city from the heights of Shaykh Jarrah. Few landscapes in the world have meant so much for so many people through the centuries and so many men have died to contemplate them. But I think also of the people: of Abu Khalid, for instance, who lives in the desert like a fish in water and who accompanied us on many a trip; of the improbably named Abu Napoleon, who fixed a broken radiator in a difficult situation; of the Syrian monks with their ancient chants who are living examples of long forgotten theological battles of the fifth century; of the Samaritan priests and their even more ancient community; of the blind shaykh led every day by his blind son to the Aqsa mosque; of the half-naked madman prophesying under the arch of the ancient khan at Aqaba; of the Hindu pilgrim from Delhi who became a guard at the Haram and reads your palm in Koranic Arabic. All of these things, the people and the physical features of the land, arouse respect and even a feeling of gratitude, because it is their past and their surroundings which are our subject of study or of meditation. They have been molded by their past, but without them their past would never be fully understandable.

Oleg Grabar
Director, Jerusalem School